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AUTHOR Harris, Larry B.; Wingett, Terry J.
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ABSTRACT

The Nebraska Legislature has mandated that each school district in the state develop a multicultural program for incorporation into all phases of the curriculum, kindergarten through grade 12. In Northeast Nebraska, the Division of Education at Wayne State College has accepted the charge to be a leader in providing impetus for the inclusion of multicultural education in the school systems, including those located in rural areas. This paper presents an overview of related literature, and a rationale, philosophy, and methodology for incorporating multicultural education in both preservice and inservice education in rural regions. Teachers in the schools have received training in human relations and multicultural education skills through inservice workshops. Preservice teachers are required to participate in at least one field based experience in a multicultural setting. Specific strategies are presented which will enable the rural teacher educator to successfully implement these concepts. Multicultural education has often been viewed as only an urban challenge; however, the increasing global society has made it imperative that all children develop positive views of cultural diversity. A list of cultural self-awareness questions is appended. (Contains 14 references.) (LL)

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Increasing Multicultural Awareness:

Understanding the Global Society from a Rural Perspective

Larry B. Harris

Terry J. Wingett

Wayne State College
Wayne, NE

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of rationale, philosophy, and methodology for incorporating multicultural education in both preservice and inservice education in rural regions. Specific strategies are presented which will enable the rural teacher educator to successfully implement these concepts. Multicultural education has often been viewed as only an urban challenge. This is not the case. The increasing global society has made it imperative that all children develop positive views of cultural diversity.

Increasing Multicultural Awareness:

Understanding the Global Society from a Rural Perspective

Both beginning teachers and experienced teachers are facing many challenges in classrooms. Perhaps the most significant of these challenges is related to the increasing diversity of students. Moral reasons, as well as more apparent societal reasons such as economic development, require that teachers address the increasing diverse nature of the student population in a manner which will increase the learning of all students. Multicultural education is directly related to the improvement of instruction and equal opportunities for all students to learn. While many school restructuring efforts are to be highly regarded, the infusion of multicultural education in all aspects of the school life of children is the most important and also the most demanding.

The purpose of this paper is to present a rationale for the inclusion of multicultural concepts and strategies in schools located in rural regions. Further, the authors will provide specific methodologies for incorporating multicultural education into teaching situations.

Related Literature

Banks (1992) conceptualized five dimensions of multicultural education. These included: (1) content knowledge; (2) knowledge construction; (3) prejudice reduction;; (4) equity pedagogy; and (5) empowerment. **Content knowledge** involves the use of examples and content from a variety of cultures to illustrate the topics being considered in a classroom. The inclusion of

content knowledge is more expeditious in certain disciplines than in others. **Knowledge construction** allows the teacher to assist students in constructing new knowledge about events and situations. This approach helps students understand, investigate, and determine how events influence what is known. Students are forced to examine various points of view related to these events. **Prejudice reduction** assists students in developing more positive attitudes toward different racial and ethnic groups. Students come to school with attitudes which largely reflect their home background. Through prejudice reduction activities including presenting positive images of diverse cultures students develop more positive attitudes. **Equity pedagogy** requires teaching practices which respect diverse learning styles within cultural and ethnic groups and facilitate the academic achievement of all students. Much research has been conducted regarding the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. Equity pedagogy requires that teachers present materials in such ways which enhance the learning opportunities for all students. **Empowerment** promotes gender, racial, and socioeconomic class equity. Schools must be restructured to provide equal opportunity for all students, and to meet the needs of the students and others, including parents, teachers, and other staff.

Tiedt and Tiedt (1990) provided effective instructional practices which also enhance multicultural education. Among these practices were moving from a climate of teaching as telling to a climate of having the learner being

actively engaged in inquiry which leads to the construction of personal meaning. Students could carefully examine movies, books and other experiences which would lead to an understanding of stereotyping. Drawing on the background of children also allows students to relate their personal experiences to broader perspectives and understandings. The methodology which teachers employ in the instructional setting demonstrates the teachers' respect for the diversity of the student population. Teachers must understand that effective multicultural teaching and education begins with the teachers' awareness, attitudes, and cultural knowledge and not with the textual material.

Gollnick and Chinn (1990) presented several strategies for multicultural education. These strategies were related to instructional materials, curriculum, instruction, teacher behaviors, and school climate. "A teacher's behavior in the classroom is a key factor in helping all students reach their potential, regardless of sex, ethnicity, age, religion, language, or exceptionality. Educators should develop skills for individualizing instruction based on the needs of students" (p.301).

Various approaches have been presented to define what is meant by multicultural education. **Teaching the exceptional and culturally different** primarily assists students from diverse backgrounds to achieve in the present society. **Human Relations** fosters positive interpersonal relationships in children from diverse backgrounds. **Single group studies** raises consciousness about a particular group by teaching the culture, history, and contributions of

the group. **Multiculturalism** promotes equality and cultural pluralism through reorganizing the curriculum to include diverse perspectives. **Education that is multicultural and reconstructionist** builds on each of the previous approaches to allow students to analyze inequality and oppression and to develop skills in social action (Sleeter, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

Background Information

Wayne State College is a comprehensive institution of higher education located in Northeast Nebraska. Wayne State College has an enrollment of approximately 4000 students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Nearly one-third of the students are enrolled in the teacher education programs. These programs include undergraduate preparation for teachers in a variety of disciplines, as well as graduate programs for administrators, counselors, and classroom teachers. Wayne State College has prepared educators for Northeast Nebraska and the rest of the state for over 100 years and maintains a strong commitment to educational excellence and service to the region. One important aspect of this regional service is working with area schools in restructuring efforts. Wayne State College and the Division of Education have a strong commitment to increasing cultural diversity in both the student body and faculty. Recently, the Division of Education entered into a cooperative program with the Nebraska Indian Community College to prepare Native American students for careers in education.

During the last legislative session, the Nebraska Legislature enacted LB 922 which mandated that each school district shall develop for incorporation into all phases of the curriculum of grades kindergarten through twelve a multicultural program. This bill requires each district to have a program for multicultural education in place by the 1993-94 school year. The program must be fully infused and operational by the 1994-95 school year.

The Division of Education at Wayne State College has begun taking a lead role with assisting local school districts in meeting these goals. During the fall semester of 1992, a team of persons from various school districts and representatives from other professions were invited to the campus to begin planning strategies for meeting the requirements of LB 922.

The Northeast Nebraska region is one of many small towns and subsequently many small school districts. Until recent years, the cultural identities of the communities have remained largely unitary. However, there are four school districts in the region which have predominant Native American populations (Winnebago, Macy, Santee, and Walthill). In addition, other school districts are undergoing demographic changes because of an in-migration of Hispanic/Latino families. The Northeast Nebraska region is also one of the poorest regions in the state. Nine of the eleven poorest counties in Nebraska are located in Wayne State College's service area.

Implementation Strategies

In an elementary classroom a white teacher posed a math problem to the class. "If there are four birds sitting in a tree and child shoots one of them with a slingshot, how many will be left?" One student answered quickly, "That's easy. One subtracted from four is three." A youth from Nigeria then answered with equal confidence, "Zero." The teacher smiled and said that the first student was right. Which is the correct answer? If one pursued the reasoning of the child from Nigeria, one would discover the answer was zero because the other birds would fly away when one was shot. The relationship of the birds and expected group behavior when one is shot was the basis for the answer. "The Nigerians contend that the group is more important than the individual, that individualism should be de-emphasized for the good of the whole" (Sue, 1992, pp. 7-8). However, in the dominant United States culture individualism and independence of action are more important than group conformance. The problem was presented as an abstract situation which required a literal answer. Traditionally, solutions that are linear, analytical, empirical, and task-oriented are more valued in the United States educational system. Both students were correct depending upon their cultural perspective. However, the child whose cultural background did not match the teacher's may have felt inferior and invalidated. Thus, this person could have concluded that being different is unacceptable (Sue, 1992).

Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (1992) expounded on the seriousness of the emotional responses of students who perceive themselves as not belonging. The fear of being excluded from the group may be overwhelming. Developing a feeling of connectedness was demonstrated during a bilingual gathering in Northeast Nebraska. All of the attenders were encouraged to sing the first verse of a song in Spanish, the second verse in English, and the third verse using only syllables (la, la, la). When the final verse had been completed, the leader asked, "Now, what language was that?" A sense of belonging was promoted by the singing and the direct asking of the question.

Educators who are aware of their own learning styles and teaching styles may plan instruction and activities that facilitate different learning styles. Gollnick and Chinn (1990) described two styles of learning/teaching: field-independent and field-sensitive. "Instruction that encourages field sensitivity includes group projects, close work with the teacher, and material in tune with the ethnic and social backgrounds of students. Field-independent instruction will focus on independent activities, minimal participation of the teacher, curriculum materials, charts and diagrams, and student work that emphasizes individual achievement" (p. 187). Traditionally, the dominant culture has engaged in more field-independent styles while groups of color have employed more field-sensitive behaviors (with the exception of many Asian-Americans). Teachers must include both styles so students learn to respond appropriately no matter what the situation - working in a group or on an independent project.

Lee (1992) stated that culturally responsive educators can teach diverse student bodies. The challenge is to consider the students' common experiences as human beings, specific experiences from differing cultural backgrounds, and the uniqueness of individual students. Multicultural education must be infused into the existing curriculum. Superficial attention to microcultures with activities like tasting ethnic foods or observing ethnic dances during cultural awareness weeks may only reinforce stereotypes.

Gollnick and Chinn (1990) cautioned educators that extra planning time will be required in order to implement effective multicultural learning. With experience, multicultural curriculum and instruction will become second nature to the effective educator. Teaching students to think critically, an essential skill for a democratic society, can be developed by critiquing textbooks, newspapers, magazines, pictures, advertisements, television, and movies in terms of their fair and non-stereotyped treatment of cultural groups. More accurate information and examples may be obtained from supplemental materials found in school and community libraries and from community members. In an extensive appendix Tiedt and Tiedt (1990) provided lists of books with background information regarding various cultural groups (People of Color, Jewish Americans, Europeans, Australians, Appalachian, Cajun, and Eskimo), general resources, books for young readers through adults (fiction, nonfiction, and folklore), poetry, children's books in other languages, and three special identity groups: aged, handicapped, and women. Speakers from

diverse cultural backgrounds could also be utilized. Educators must be knowledgeable about the cultures and values of members of their communities as well as their own unintentional biases learned over a life-time. "The area of teacher behavior is one in which the teacher has almost total control" (Gollnick and Chinn, 1990, p. 298).

The selection of textbook materials is an important area for evaluation of multicultural curriculum. A social studies textbook recently adopted by a curriculum committee believing this series to be more culturally representative was described as including three paragraphs, rather than only one in the previous edition, devoted to contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr. However, a member of the committee pointed out the theme of the United States as a nation of immigrants as central to the fifth grade book and was quoted by Epstein and Ellis (1992):

> Once you have decided that the story of America is the story of Europeans escaping events like the potato famine and seeking a better way of life, then you are telling that part of American history which fits that version. The story of African-Americans and Native Americans is not that story; they were not voluntary immigrants seeking a better life. Our story is the story of a continuous, never-ending struggle for justice and human values within this country (p. 636).

This point was presented visually in a cartoon which depicted two Native Americans standing on the shore talking. The year was 1492; three ships were pictured in the background as a European man stepped on shore. One Native American nudged the other and said, "Look what I found!" (translation provided).

Recognizing the biases that exist in classroom materials and procedures is essential to making changes. Reading critically for multicultural content and sensitivity is challenging for educators and curriculum committees.

Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (1992) suggested that educational experiences which actively engage the emotions of learners are more effective for lasting transfer of learning and behavior changes than merely telling. Students remember writing a story or dramatizing a situation in which discrimination, prejudice, or stereotypes are depicted, especially if they affectively experience the role of the person who suffered discrimination. Multicultural experiences should facilitate cognitive skills including exploring, reflecting, reasoning, and problem solving. Eitzen (1992) stated, "most important, though, all children must be shown that the school and the community want them to succeed" (p. 590).

In rural communities there is not always **ethnic** diversity; however, there is always **cultural** diversity. Teachers need to be aware of the microcultures that exist in rural communities. Socio-economic levels, religious differences, ancestors from different European countries, and others contribute

to microcultures within the rural community. In addition, rural communities, at least in Nebraska, are experiencing major demographic shifts.

Traditionally, the dominant culture has "focused on uniqueness to the point that social and related cultural/historical factors have been forgotten" (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1987, p. 95). Difficulties in education arise when educators and students are unaware of their own, as well as others, cultures and histories. No two individuals possess the same cultural/historical background. How well prepared are each of us to work with a variety of people who represent diversity in race, religious faith, age, ethnicity, etc. (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1987).

A useful first step toward cultural empathy is awareness of one's own cultural and unique background. Many people in the United States and Canada are influenced by several cultures of their ancestors. Conflict between the value systems of the various cultures is inevitable. We are also influenced by materialism, television, and freedom of choice which tends to operate strongly in the dominant culture. Most of us in North America are at least tricultural. The cultural values and mores are transmitted to us through extended families, neighborhoods, communities, government, and the media (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1993).

Even within the same family, each individual has a unique life experience. The appendix contains a list of possible questions to consider

when assisting others in increasing awareness of family background and cultural influences.

The examination of cultural heritage can arouse one's curiosity about which beliefs are held in common in one's family and which beliefs are significantly different. Family messages must be understood to increase awareness of one's cultural background (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Downing, 1987).

The person who can move from a tunnel vision of reality to understanding the complexity of a multicultural reality can generate ways to respond to complex educational issues. Educators are challenged to help students learn new ways of responding to ever changing life situations.

Multicultural education is continual. Consider the analogy that one views the world and the profession through conceptual glasses. The frame of the glasses represents our perception of others different from ourselves. The lenses depict the focus and clarity with which those perceptions are seen. Because cultural biases are sometimes difficult to see, the lenses may require periodic adjustment or replacement. We must determine when these adjustments are necessary (Dobbins & Skillings, 1991).

Wu (1992) encouraged educators by stating, "Do not ever underestimate your power as an educator: your power to inspire, your power to make all of your students feel special; your power to make all of your students feel included, and, perhaps, most importantly, your power to plant hope" (p. 15).

Current Activities

In Northeast Nebraska, a regional college has undertaken the charge to be a leader in providing impetus for the inclusion of multicultural education in the school systems. Most of the teachers in the schools have received training in human relations/multicultural education skills through inservice workshops. These workshops were conducted over a two year period in almost all schools in the region.

Preservice teachers are required to participate in at least one field based experience in a truly multicultural setting. This experience must be either the three week experience in the sophomore year or the student teaching experience. In addition, approximately 8% of the student teachers select the opportunity to complete their student teaching requirement through an urban experience in Kansas City.

The college recently entered into a cooperative arrangement with a tribal college to prepare Native American students as teachers. Under a grant from the Office of Indian Education, ten students who are graduates of the tribal college are currently enrolled in the professional preparation program. These students have all made a commitment to begin their teaching careers in one of the school districts with predominantly Native American populations.

The college has begun working with community leaders and agencies to assist with projects related to increasing multicultural awareness. These activities have included working with an ESL summer school, inservice

presentations, and activities on the campus which are open to teachers, students, and the public.

The Division of Education has planned an institute for increasing the level of multicultural education across the region. This institute will bring educators from a variety of schools together to plan ways to implement new activities which will help ensure that all children are provided with the opportunity to learn. The first institute will be held this summer on the college campus.

Summary and Conclusions

Often multicultural education has been viewed as an urban concern. Those of us who work and live in rural areas must also become involved in understanding and promoting knowledge and acceptance of cultural diversity. The children who are growing and learning in our small schools will soon become major players in a global society. They will no longer be afforded the opportunity to live their lives in relative isolation. They must develop the attitudes and dispositions which will allow them the opportunity to become effective members of this culturally rich society.

One of the roles of teacher preparation programs in regional institutions of higher education is to provide the leadership in developing this sense of multiculturalism. Activities must be planned which will strengthen already good school systems. These activities must speak specifically to the needs of the teachers and the children in these school systems. Specific activities

which will increase the level of multiculturalism in the public schools must be presented and infused into the curriculum.

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Appendix

Questions for cultural self awareness:

1. With what cultural background do you first identify?
2. What were the background of those with whom you lived and the people before them? Picture a family tree in your mind with your heritage including the country in which you now live.
3. What are your central groups (cultural, ethnic, religious)? Are you monocultural, bicultural, or more?
4. What are the messages (family values) that have influenced your development?
   a. Was your family more relational and group oriented, believing problems are best solved together, or more individualistic and independent problem solvers?
   b. What was the family attitude toward education?
   c. What were the expectations of males and females?
   d. What were family attitudes toward expression of feelings?
   e. Who would be the last person in your family tree who would be considered an ESL person today?
   f. Were there cross cultural marriages (including religion and social status) in your family?

adapted from Ivey, Ivey, & Downing, (1987)